TL 4015-11

VII[TH] SYMPOSIUM ON TIMOR OF OPORTO UNIVERSITY
7-20 JULY 1997

1 -THE HISTORY OF U.S.-INDONESIAN RELATIONS AND THE CURRENT CONTEXT

STEPHEN ZUNES
Department of Politics University of San Francisco

This presentation will look at the history of U.S.- Indonesian relations, beginning with the tacit support of Dutch recolonization efforts, to attempts at undermining Sukarno as he became increasingly outspoken in his advocacy of nationalism and non-alignment, to the U.S. role in the 1965 coup which brought Suharto to power. The widespread anti-leftist purges and massacres that followed led U.S. officials to declare Indonesia to be the "bright spot in Asia" at a time when the U.S. was fighting the communist insurgency in Vietnam. The United States also gave support for the 1975 invasion of East Timor and its bloody aftermath, as rigid Cold War priorities gave precedence ver human rights and international law. While the end of the Cold War initially brought hope that there would be a shift in U.S. policies, the role of Indonesia as an important market for U.S. products, a source of cheap labor and raw materials for American companies and an ongoing strategic ally in a rapidly hanging and increasingly important region demonstrated that very little had, in fact, changed. While there are now some indications that the United States would like to see an end to the Suharto era and greater political liberalization, the U.S. is clearly unwilling to apply the kind of pressure necessary to speed the process. Instead, the U.S. is hoping for a somewhat more legitimate and less repressive regime that would essentially maintain the status quo of strategic and economic relations.

This presentation will also examine the role of U.S. corporate interests and other U.S. domestic forces in maintaining the ongoing close relationship between the two governments.

OBSERVATIONS OF THE RECENT INDONESIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

This presentation will center around an eyewitness account of the 29 May parliamentary elections and the days leading up to it, based on observations by the presenter in Jakarta and Yogyakarta. Particular attention will be given to the severe restrictions placed on opposition parties and their ability to campaign and put forward their positions to the population. Also addressed will be divisions within the opposition parties regarding whether to participate or boycott the elections as a result of the limitations. Indeed, more noteworthy than the percentage won by the three legal parties is the voter turnout. Taking in account that the parties were themselves creations of the government, combined with elaborate systems of patronage --particularly in the rural areas -- by the ruling party, this presentation will raise questions as to whether democratic change in Indonesia can be enhanced through elections at all. Instead, this paper will speculate as to whether extra-electoral opposition campaigns, such as "people power" and other forms of large-scale nonviolent resistance, might be a more likely scenario for change.

electoral opposition campaigns, such as "people power" and other forms of large-scale nonviolent resistance, might be a more likely scenario for change.

U.S. POLICY ON SELF-DETERMINATION FOR PALESTINE, WESTERN SAHARA AND CYPRUS IN COMPARISON WITH EAST TIMOR

Though support for the right of self-determination has been a mantra of U.S. foreign policy since Woodrow Wilson, U.S. policy has never fully lived up to the Wilsonian ideal. Indeed, East Timor has never been a unique event in modern U.S. diplomacy.

Turkish occupatin forces in northern Cyprus, Moroccan occupation forces in Western Sahara, as well as Israeli occupation troops in the West Bank, Gaza, southern Lebanon and Syria's Golan have been supported by U.S. military assistance. In another parallel with East Timor, the U.S. has blocked effective action by the United Nations to uphold international law in each of these cases.

This presentation examines the history of the U.S. role in these three conflicts, comparing and contrasting them with U.S. policy towards Indonesia and East Timor. U.S. support for the Portuguese colonial wars in Africa during the 1960s and 1970s will also be examined in this context. Contrary to analyses which emphasize domestic lobbies tied to the occupying powers, this
presentation makes the case that broader strategic and economic interests are the primary motivators for such policies. This presentation concludes by offering the hope that, due to increases public awareness in the United States resulting in popular pressure on the U.S. government, the East Timor struggle
may have a better chance than the others for a shift in U.S. policy towards the right of self-determination.

2- U.S. POLICY TOWARDS EAST TIMOR

In December 1975, President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger visited the Indonesian capital of Djakarta. At that time, Indonesian forces had already begun to support a tiny pro-annexationist faction in East Timor, which had just won independence from Portugal. By all accounts, in the meeting with the Indonesian dictator Suharto, Ford gave the green light for a full scale invasion, which began within 24 hours. Kissinger publicly stated that the United States "understands Indonesia's position on East Timor," namely, that it not be allowed its right to self-determination under international law. While the United Nations Security Council voted unanimously for Indonesia to halt its invasion and withdraw to within its internationally-recognized borders, the U.S. blocked the U.N. from imposing
economic sanctions or any other means of enforcing its mandate. Then-U.S. ambassador to the U.N. Daniel Patrick Moynihan later bragged how, under State Department instructions, he had made the UN "totally ineffectual" in bringing a halt to the invasion.

During his first year in office, President Jimmy Carter ordered an increase in military aid to Indonesia by 79%, including deliveries of counter-insurgency aircraft which allowed the Indonesians to dramatically expand the air war with devastating consequences. When asked about U.S. law prohibiting such arms transfers to such aggressor nations, a Carter State Department official stated that since Indonesia had annexed East Timor, the conflict was no longer an invasion but an internal rebellion.

Since that time, the U.S. voted repeatedly with a minority of countries in the U.N. General Assembly opposing self-determination for East Timor. Despite close diplomatic contacts, including several summit meetings, the United States has never publicly raised the issue of self-determination with Indonesian authorities, though the Clinton Administration has called for an mprovement of the human rights situation in the territory. U.S. arms have continued to flow, though, as with many other countries, arms sales have replaced grants. Congress has restricted taxpayer-funded U.S. training of the Indonesian military since 1992, but the Clinton Administration is now calling for a resumption of full unrestricted military instruction. Since the 1991 Dili massacre and, in particular, last year's Nobel Peace prize announcement, pressure on the U.S. government from the news media and concerned citizens has reached an unprecedented level and slight shifts in U.S. policy may be forthcoming.

THE UNITED STATES AND THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

With the end of the Cold War, many observers argued that the United Nations could finally fulfill its mandate as a consistent and balanced arbiter of international law. Without the threat of an ideologically-inspired Soviet veto in the United Nations Security Council or of Cold War strategic prerogatives overcoming a nation's legal obligations to the international community, some believed that the "new world order" promised by former US President George Bush, where legal principles could triumph over power politics, would finally

become the cornerstone of international relations. This possibility was further enhanced, some argued, by the fact that the United States -- with its strong legal tradition, history of idealism, and decisive role in the drafting of the UN Charter -- had become the world's one remaining superpower. The United States has frequently supported and, at times, instigated humanitarian initiatives and has provided generous logistical and financial support for relief operations and continues to do so. Indeed, the UN has often depended on the US for its degree of effectiveness it has achieved in many settings. Yet the potential abuse of an international body by any such quasi-hegemonic power is great. The United States has exerted an enormous amount of influence on the direction and priorities of the United Nations during its five decades of existence, particularly in the organization's early years—which corresponded with America's immediate post-war dominance—and more recently, with the collapse of its superpower rival, the Soviet Union. Historically, the United States has been internationalist when it can lead and isolationist or unilateralist when it cannot. American support of the UN depends not on any idealist principles regarding its ability to uphold its charter or to support international law, but in its willingness to acquiesce to certain policies of the US government.

Conversely, the US has demonstrated its propensity to block efforts by the UN to uphold its charter and international legal principles should it challenge US prerogatives. During the past 25 years, the United States has used its veto power more than all the other members of the Security Council combined. Many other resolutions failed to even be considered due to a threatened US veto, such as the imposition of sanctions against Indonesia for its ongoing occupation of East Timor. Indeed, these vetoes and threats of vetoes have been used primarily to prevent United Nations censure or sanctions against regimes engaged in flagrant violations of international law that the United States government considered to be strategic allies; the veto has also been used to counter resolutions against illegal actions committed by the US itself. Meanwhile, successive US administrations have vigorously pushed for sanctions -- and, in the case of Iraq, military actions-- against adversary regimes which have engaged in similar, and sometimes even less serious, illegal activities.

This presentation examines this ongoing politicization of the United Nations by the United States, particular regarding the situation of Indonesia and East Timor. While the UN has, since its inception, been used by many member states in such a cynical and manipulative manner, the role of the US in the UN stands out for several reasons: the striking contrast between America's outspokenly idealist rhetoric and its realpolitik behavior, its ability to dominate the UN's agenda, and the flagrant level of hypocrisy and double-standards noted by UN-watchers everywhere, except perhaps in the United States itself.